

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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News Release

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The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council will hold public meetings from June 10-14, 1996 at the Pier House, One Duval Street, Key West, Florida; telephone: (305) 296-4600; (800) 327-8340.

Council Considering Limiting Entry and additional regulations for Snapper Grouper Fishery

The South Atlantic Council's Snapper Grouper Committee has been working with the Advisory Panel to finalize public hearing documents for Amendments 8 and 9 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

Management of the snapper grouper complex is difficult because the management unit consists of 23 different species, each with individual biological characteristics. The size and capacity of fleets fishing for these species are significantly higher than the stocks can sustain on a long-term basis, so the council is proposing a limited access program.

Amendment 9 contains several options for limiting the number of vessels fishing for snapper grouper species with a federal permit. Depending on the criteria for limiting the number of vessels, Amendment 9 may put a cap on the number of vessels participating in the fishery in the future, but may not lead to the required effort reduction for overfished species; thus, the council is also proposing measures in Amendment 8 which would further reduce fishing mortality.

Amendment 8 proposes bag, trip, and minimum size limits, as well as changes to the type of allowable fishing gear to protect some of the overfished species.

The council is expected to approve Amendments 8 and 9 for public hearing, and set a public hearing schedule at the June meeting in Key West. The documents will be available to the public at the meeting, or may be obtained by calling the council office at (803) 571-4366.

Council to Consider Prohibiting the Sale of Recreationally-Caught Fish

At the June meeting, the South Atlantic Council will consider prohibiting the sale of fish caught by recreational anglers in South Atlantic federal waters.

Currently under the management system, the council allows for the sale of fish taken in a legal bag limit either with the use of the federal permit or with a commercial state license. Many people think if you are a recreational fisherman, you should eat your catch, give it away or let it go. Many feel if you sell fish, you are a commercial fisherman and you should abide by laws which govern the commercial industry.

Last year the South Atlantic Council held a series of scoping meetings from Key West to North Carolina to gather comments from fishermen relative to the issue of the sale of recreationally-caught fish. The council took final scoping comments concerning this controversial issue at the April meeting.

The council will review all comments received during the year on this topic at the June meeting in Key West, and decide if regulations are needed. There are several options to consider at this point, including: (1) leave things as they are; (2) prohibit the sale of bag limit fish caught by recreational anglers in all fisheries, in some fisheries, or in some areas based upon what states allow.

If the council does go forward with any action relative to this issue, it would hold a series of public hearings, and would take 6 months to a year before any regulations were implemented. The public will have additional opportunity to provide comments.

Agenda

The next council meeting will take place from June 10-14, 1996, at the Pier House, One Duval Street, Key West, FL; telephone: (305) 296-8340.

Monday, June 10

1:30-5:30 The Scientific and Statistical Committee will meet to discuss Snapper Grouper Amendments 8 and 9 options; review the Gag Grouper Assessment; hear a report on the economic assessment of commercial reef fishermen; review the 1996 Wreckfish Assessment; and discuss the National Marine Fisheries Service proposal to discontinue the Spiny Lobster Fishery Management Plan.

Tuesday, June 11

8:30-12:00 The Scientific and Statistical Committee will meet to receive a presentation on the mackerel stock assessment.

1:30-5:30 The Mackerel Advisory Panel will meet to develop recommendations for total allowable catch and bag limits for the 1997 mackerel fishing season.

Wednesday, June 12

8:30-12:00 The Mackerel Advisory Panel will meet jointly with the Mackerel Committee to review the status of king mackerel trip limits, develop committee recommendations for TACs and bag limits, and discuss other issues pertaining to Spanish mackerel.

1:45 The full council will receive the Mackerel Committee report and take public comment at 1:45 p.m. on TACs and bag limits. They will then set the annual TACs and bag limits for king and Spanish mackerel, and discuss other framework actions.

3:00-5:30 The full council will receive the Snapper Grouper Committee Report and approve Amendment 8 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery management Plan for public hearing.

Thursday, June 13

8:30-12:00 The full council will receive the Controlled Access Committee report and approve Amendment 9 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan for public hearing.

1:30-5:30 The council will review the recreational sale issue and develop a council position on the sale of bag limit (recreational) caught fish; the council will also receive the Executive and Finance Committee reports, and approve the supplemental fiscal year 1996 and 1997 council activities schedules and budgets.

Friday, June 14

8:30-11:00 The full council will receive a lobster trap composition presentation; review the stauts of the Golden Crab Fishery Management Plan, Amendment 1 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan (Rock Shrimp), consolidated regulations, and withdrawal of the Spiny Lobster Fishery Management Plan. They will also receive agency and liaison and other reports.

Council to Set 1996-1997 Mackerel Quotas and Bag Limits in June

Based on the most recent stock assessment for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, the council will set total allowable catch and bag limits for the 1996-97 fishing year, and will consider trip limits and other framework actions at the June meeting.

For the 1996/97 stock assessment, the Stock Assessment Panel incorporated bycatch data as well as an unweighted spawning potential ratio (SPR) which affects the manner in which the allowable biological catch (ABC) ranges are calculated. Although both stocks are not considered overfished, Atlantic king mackerel will likely see a drop in total allowable catch (TAC) because of a more restrictive ABC range as a result of this most recent analysis.

This change in the analysis seems to parallel anecdotal information the council has been receiving from fishermen who maintained the stock was not in as good a shape as indicated from past stock assessments. The panels findings are as follows:

The 1996/97 ABC for Atlantic Migratory group king mackerel is 4.1-6.8 million pounds. Last year the ABC was 7.3-10.5 million pounds and the council set TAC at 7.3 million pounds.

The 1996/97 ABC for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel is 5-7 million pounds. Last year the ABC was 4.9-14.7 million pounds and the council set TAC at 9.4 million pounds.

King Mackerel Recreational Bag Limit Reduced

Recreational fishermen in the South Atlantic should be aware that, effective January 1, 1996, the daily bag limit for king mackerel was reduced from five to three fish in federal waters.

The council reduced the catch limit to three fish from the Georgis/Florida border through New York. Off Florida's coast, the catch limit remains two fish per person per day.

Though king mackerel are not overfished, the council's Stock Assessment Panel, Scientific and Statistical Committee, Mackerel Advisory Panel, as well as other anglers expressed concern about the biological status of the stock.

According to Council Chairman, David Cupka, catch information indicates that the abundance of king mackerel is lower than that of previous years, and the council reduced the catch limit "in an effort to curb any further decline and assure conservation of the stock throughout its range," Cupka said.

For more information, contact the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council office at (803) 571-4366.